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Homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

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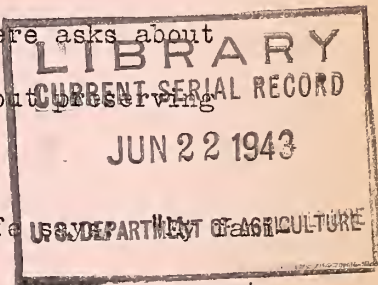
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QUESTION BOX

ANSWERS FROM

Different ways with snap beans?
Dry sour cherries?

home economists of the U.S.
Department of Agriculture

Today the mailbag brings some questions from housewives about cooking and preserving the vegetables and fruits in season. One letter here asks about different ways to cook and serve snap beans...another asks about preserving cherries by drying.



Let's begin with the letter about snap beans. A housewife always gets tired of snap beans before the summer is over. We grow a great many beans in our garden. They are a standby vegetable all during the hot weather. My husband complains that they always look and taste the same."

In answer to that letter home economists say you have your choice of many ways to serve and season snap beans so they will not become monotonous to the family. Of course, the usual way of cooking them is to boil them. But after that you can vary their looks and taste in many ways. To begin with, of course, you want to boil them properly...that is, in a small amount of lightly salted boiling water until just tender...no longer. You can spoil both the taste and color of beans by overcooking. Very young tender beans are nice cooked whole with just the "tops and tails off," as the old expression goes. But larger older beans cook more quickly if cut in pieces or shredded. The less time they need for cooking tender, the more delicate their texture and the more natural their color. Serve the cooking water right along with the beans, or add it to any sauce you make.

The flavor of ham or bacon makes beans delicious. You can cook them with a ham bone to give that ham flavor.



Or you can pour hot ham drippings over the beans after cooking...or add bits of leftover minced ham. Or use bacon fat or bits of cooked bacon or salt pork.

Snap beans are good served in cheese sauce, too, or in tomato sauce. They are good scalloped in white sauce with browned bread crumbs over the top.

Beans are good cooked with some other vegetables, too...chopped cooked beans and chopped cooked carrots go well together...so do chopped cooked beans and shredded cooked cabbage and onion. Chopped parsley heated in fat is a nice seasoning for beans.

And now for a way to cook beans in their own steam...panned beans with cooked pork cut up very fine. You might call this dish "pork and beans, summer style." It is a combination hearty enough for the main dish at the meal. Shred a quart of young tender beans...very young and tender. Also chop or shred a pint of fresh pork already cooked. You can use any left-over fresh pork for this purpose. Now melt 2 tablespoons of meat drippings in a heavy frying pan...add the beans and a teaspoon of salt...cover...and cook for 20 or 30 minutes, turning the beans frequently. Add the cooked shredded pork. Stir until well mixed with the beans. Cook about 5 minutes longer to be sure the meat is thoroughly heated. Then serve on toast. No water added anywhere along the line, you see. The beans just cook in drippings and in their own steam. The cooked pork adds flavor and food value to the dish.

The second question is about putting up cherries by drying. A letter here says: "My sour cherry trees are full of fruit this year. Of course, I want to put up as much of this fruit as possible, but I don't want to fill all my jars with canned sour cherries. I have been wondering if I could put up some of the cherries by drying."

Home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture say: Yes. Sour cherries happen to be one of the fruits that dry most successfully. You can dry

cherries in the oven of a gas or electric stove. Or you can build a simple bird-cage type of drier to swing over a coal stove or wood stove. Or you can build a cabinet type of drier to stand on top of a gas or kerosene stove. You can get full directions from the free bulletin called "Drying Food for Victory Meals," No. 1918. Write a postcard to the U. S. Department of Agriculture for this bulletin on drying.

Pick cherries for drying when they are just ripe...that is, still firm. Wash them. Discard any imperfect cherries. Then remove stem and pit. Put them in a colander to drain for about an hour. The juice that drains off you can put up in bottles or jars...or you can use immediately in cold summer drinks or in desserts.

After draining the cherries, spread them out in single layers on the trays of your drier, whichever kind of drier you have. Start the drying at 120 degrees Fahrenheit, and don't let the heat get above 150 degrees at any time or the cherries will dry too fast. If you let cherries dry too fast, they will get hard on the outside before they have dried on the inside. You want to dry cherries until they are leathery and pliable like raisins. You can soon learn to tell by feeling of the fruit on the trays how nearly dry it is. Until the fruit is completely dry, it will feel moist as you touch it and will also feel cooler than the air flowing over it. If you dry with too high heat, especially at first, the cherries will get a hard crust on the outside yet be moist and soft inside. Then, of course, they will not keep.

When the cherries are thoroughly dry all through, package them immediately. If you let them stand around the kitchen or anywhere out in the air, they will absorb any moisture in the air and are likely to mold and spoil. Put them immediately in moisture-proof containers, such as glass jars or tin boxes with tight-fitting lids. The leftover jars you have around the house--peanut-butter jars, or maybe pickle jars, or glass coffee jars...those with tops that will not seal tight enough for canning are all right for holding dried fruit. If the tops don't make a perfect seal, you can keep air out with a strip of muslin dipped in hot paraffin wrapped around the opening. You can also store dried cherries in heavy paper or cloth bags that you have previously dipped in melted paraffin. The idea is simply to keep dried food dry...keep it away from moisture in the air and also safe from insects. Containers of dried food should go in a dark, cool place.

That's all the questions for today. More next week.

